

# LETTERS *to the Editor*

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## Medicine in a Changing Society

TO THE EDITOR: I read with interest your editorial "America in Process of Change" in the April 1976 edition [West J Med 124:329-330, Apr 1976]. I appreciated what you wrote, but believe that a fundamental point or two was omitted. It is apparent enough that America may be in a "process of fundamental change." However, I believe that in your analysis sufficient qualification is lacking so that changes that are occurring in the neighborhood, in the family and in the legal system are lumped together without real differentiation as to desirability from the "idea of limitless growth, unbridled competition." It seems important to me to try to decide which changes, real or contemplated, are desirable and which may not be desirable. Important in such deliberations is to understand the way that human beings actually behave and respond in a psychobiologic sense.

My theme, in answer to your statement, might be called "Human Nature as Applied to Social Reform." One gets the impression in your final paragraphs that changes are upon us, that we perhaps had better adjust to them and go along with them, and that Medicine had better somehow join the procession of adjusting and being a part of the change.

At least, you did not say that the 4,000 years of history must have taught us something about what is really good for people, how they preserve their freedoms, and what is apt to give them "personal fulfillment and quality of life." You have offered no opposition to the notion that these qualities, in addition to the purely physical necessities of food, water and bodily support, are not possible without hard work, self-discipline and personal involvement. You failed to note that personal fulfillment is possible in a wide range of social environments, and that these may include a moderate kind of competitiveness between people, a cohesive family, the sense of personal fulfillment coming from work to obtain the goods of life. Without earning, by some effort or work, one's goods, there can be little personal fulfillment or improved quality of life. The gift of these commodities, from whatever source, de-

means their value. All around us are the social failures, replete with commodities provided for them, and yet asking for—demanding—more.

I would suggest then that human nature should be assessed by those who know it best, the physicians and the medical community at large. Between the public and private health practitioners, psychologists and psychiatrists, internists and other practitioners among people, there should be generated a good understanding of what human beings really need in order to be fulfilled, to be happy and to be in some way successful, and at the same time to benefit the world in some much larger way than their own lives alone. This, in addition to devising better approaches to pure physical and mental medicine, can be the contribution of physicians and indeed is among their prime responsibilities.

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## A Changing America

TO THE EDITOR: In the past few decades, there have been truly fundamental changes in the United States affecting the values central to our civilization. [America in process of change (Editorial). West J Med 124:329-330, Apr 1976]. The spirit of our time is evident in the questioning of the judgment and integrity of previous generations in their ideas, conduct, institutions and decisions. There has been an almost unbelievable denial of any great amount of true wisdom in the past and almost total rejection of all that has been learned in the past, thereby opening the way for remaking man and society.

There is a climate of national "paranoia"—a distrust of past performance. The trials of the Rosenbergs and Hiss, and even the jury system, are looked upon as the debris of prejudice. A disturbing shadow is cast over the future performance of the CIA, the FBI and the police. Traditional morality is delegated to the garbage heap; permissiveness and the "joys of sex" are widely advertised but the connection to the "sorrows of sex" (such as venereal disease, divorce and abortion) eludes detection.

Attacks on business (such as it is now with